# Medical Changes Dr. Dan Brewer Witnessed During His Long Career in Fairbury

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For: FairburyNews.net
Date: July 19, 2026

Dr. Dan Brewer practiced medicine in Fairbury for more than half a century. When he began his medical practice in 1876, the science of medicine was still developing. By the time he died in 1933, medical knowledge had advanced dramatically. During those fifty-seven years, Dr. Brewer witnessed some of the most important changes in medical history.

Dr. Brewer was born in 1843 in Warren, Ohio. During his youth, medicine was still a profession where doctors relied heavily on personal observation and practical experience. Hospitals were few, and most patients were treated at home.

Dr. Brewer originally worked as a teacher and later served as principal of the Waukesha Reform School in Wisconsin. During this time, he began studying medicine. In 1873, he enrolled in Bennett Medical College in Chicago. He later attended courses at Hahnemann Medical College and participated in clinical lectures at Cook County Hospital.

Dr. Brewer graduated with first honors in 1876 and soon afterward moved to Fairbury to begin his medical practice.

A doctor practicing in a small Illinois town in the late 1800s faced many challenges. Most medical care took place in patients' homes. When someone became seriously ill, the doctor was called and traveled to the house, often by horse and buggy. Night calls were common, and doctors frequently worked long hours during epidemics or disease outbreaks.

Medical equipment was limited. The thermometer and stethoscope were among the few diagnostic tools available. Doctors relied heavily on careful observation of symptoms, listening to the chest with a stethoscope, and their own experience in treating similar illnesses.

One of the greatest dangers doctors faced during the early years of Dr. Brewer's practice was infection. Germ theory—the idea that microorganisms cause disease—was still gaining acceptance during the 1870s. Earlier in the century, many doctors had not understood the importance of cleanliness in preventing infection.

During Dr. Brewer's career, antiseptic practices gradually became more common. Doctors began washing their hands, sterilizing instruments, and using cleaner surgical techniques. These changes dramatically reduced infections and improved survival rates for patients undergoing surgery.

WHEN DR. BREWER BEGAN IN 1876
The Medical Changes
Dr. Dan Brewer
Witnessed During His Long Career in Fairbury
BY THE TIME DR. BREWER DIED IN 1933
Home Visits by Horse and Buggy
Early Stethoscope
X-Rays (1895)
Vaccines & Public Health Advances
VACCINE SMALLPOX
Early Thermometer
Bloodletting Tools
BAYER ASPIRIN
Aspirin (1899)
DIPHTHERIA ANTITOXIN
Diphtheria Antitoxin (1890s)
Herbal Remedies & Simple Drugs
Patients Treated at Home
INSULIN 100 UNITS 10 c.c.
Insulin (1922)
Safer Surgery & Better Outcomes
Fifty-seven years of progress in medicine – from 1876 to 1933

Another important medical advance during Dr. Brewer's lifetime was the development of vaccines. Smallpox vaccination had existed since the early 1800s, but public health programs slowly expanded during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Doctors like Dr. Brewer played an important role in protecting communities from contagious diseases by encouraging vaccination and helping control outbreaks.

Childhood diseases were another serious concern during this era. Illnesses such as diphtheria, scarlet fever, and whooping cough could spread quickly through communities and sometimes proved fatal.

In the 1890s, scientists developed diphtheria antitoxin, one of the first effective treatments for a deadly infectious disease. This new treatment allowed doctors to save many children who previously would not have survived. Medical breakthroughs like this gradually transformed the work of physicians across the country.

Another major advance occurred in 1895 with the discovery of X-rays. For the first time, doctors could see inside the human body without surgery. X-rays allowed physicians to diagnose broken bones and other internal problems much more accurately than before.

Although new technology often appeared first in large city hospitals, these discoveries eventually influenced medical practice in smaller towns like Fairbury as well.

The development of modern medicines also changed medical treatment during Dr. Brewer's lifetime. Earlier, doctors relied heavily on herbal remedies and simple drug

compounds. By the early twentieth century, more standardized medications were becoming available.

One widely used medicine introduced during this period was aspirin, which became popular after 1899. Aspirin provided doctors with a reliable treatment for pain and fever, two of the most common symptoms physicians treated.

Perhaps the most dramatic medical breakthrough during the later years of Dr. Brewer's life was the discovery of insulin in 1922. Before insulin, patients with severe diabetes often had little hope of long-term survival. Insulin therapy quickly became one of the most important lifesaving treatments in modern medicine.

Dr. Brewer was already an elderly physician when insulin was introduced, but he lived long enough to see this remarkable discovery begin saving lives.

While medical science advanced, Dr. Brewer also remained an important part of the Fairbury community. For many families, the local doctor was one of the most trusted people in town. Doctors cared for patients during illness, delivered babies, and often treated several generations within the same family.

Dr. Brewer practiced medicine in Fairbury during a period when the town itself was growing and changing. Railroads, businesses, schools, and churches were expanding as the community developed.

Throughout these years, Dr. Brewer continued his medical work. He treated illnesses, responded to emergencies, and made house calls throughout the Fairbury area.

In addition to his professional work, Dr. Brewer also experienced both happiness and tragedy in his personal life. His daughter, Bethel Brewer, married Andrew Bertrume Claudon II, the son of one of Fairbury’s prominent bankers. The couple had one son, Dann Brewer Claudon.

Tragedy struck the family in 1926 when Bethel died at the age of thirty-seven. The following year, another tragedy occurred when A. B. Claudon II died during the banking scandal that led to the closure of Claudon Bank.

After these events, Dr. Brewer became the guardian of his young grandson, Dann Brewer Claudon, and raised him in his Elm Street home.

Dr. Brewer continued practicing medicine in Fairbury until he died in 1933 at the age of ninety. His medical career had lasted nearly six decades.

When Dr. Brewer first arrived in Fairbury in 1876, doctors worked in an era before modern medical technology, before antibiotics, and before many lifesaving treatments existed. By the time he died, medicine had already entered a new scientific age.

The long career of Dr. Dan Brewer provides a fascinating glimpse into how much medical science changed during one lifetime. Through his work, he helped care for two generations of Fairbury citizens while witnessing some of the greatest advances in medical history.

Dr. Brewer's life reminds us that scientific progress often unfolds slowly over many years, and dedicated physicians like him helped bring those improvements to small communities across America.